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CLOSING THE GAP

PARLIAMENT, REPRESENTATION AND THE WORKING CLASS

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SUMMARY

Recent political scandals in Westminster have once again put the issue of trust in politics at the top of the agenda. An overwhelming number of people in the UK today feel they are inadequately represented by their politicians. A recent survey commissioned by IPPR, Electoral Reform Society, Unlock Democracy and Compass found four in five people in Britain say politicians poorly understand their day to day lives and are "not interested in listening to what ordinary citizens want".

While MPs have become more representative in terms of gender and ethnicity in recent years, there is a large and growing 'representation gap' in terms of social class. There is an urgent need to rebuild faith amongst the public in their representatives. A key part of this should be ensuring that those people who become MPs truly are representative of the people they claim to speak for. In recent decades there has been progress in closing the 'representation gap' in terms of gender and ethnicity, though more progress is undoubtedly needed. However, on social class, the 'representation gap' has grown and is now very wide.

TABLE S.1: MPS ARE NOT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UK PUBLIC

	MPs (%)	General public (%)	Representation gap (%)
Women	34	51	17
Ethnic minority	10	15	5
Working class	7	34	27
No higher education	14	66	52

Source: IPPR analysis of Representative Audit of Britain survey (2019), Barton et al (2022), Butler et al (2021), ONS (2021a, 2020, 2019)

This class gap is not driven by voters discriminating against working-class candidates but by a lack of supply. Several studies have found voters do not discriminate against working-class candidates at the ballot box. Instead, the main cause of the class gap is the diminishing supply of working-class candidates. Some part of this is down to the decline in the proportion of the UK population that is working class – but the proportion of MPs that are working class has declined *twice* as fast. That is because the 'class ceiling' has also been lowered. Two main factors play a role in this. First, trade unions are no longer as able to provide a route for working-class people into politics. Second, the time and money required to become a candidate has grown and is now highly burdensome, something that locks out many potential working-class candidates.

Representation in politics matters because it has considerable influence on the voting behaviour of citizens and the policy choices of parliamentarians. There are two main reasons why representation matters. First, representation shapes what issues get debated and what policy decisions are taken. For example, studies have

found that working-class representatives tend to be more supportive of action to tackle economic inequality and support more redistributive policy. Second, it has an impact on whether and how citizens vote at elections. The decline in working-class candidates has contributed to a decline in class voting as well as to a decline in voter turnout among working-class populations.

We argue that political parties and the government should take action to close the class 'representation gap'. Measures should include the following.

1. Political parties should record and publish the number of candidates they have from working-class backgrounds and set public targets to improve representation.

2. Political parties should invest in building new talent pipelines with institutions that bridge the gap between working-class communities and politics including trade unions, the third sector and local government.

3. Political parties should seek to increase the number and diversity of members, specifically targeting groups that are underrepresented in their memberships.

4. Political parties should invest greater resource into financially supporting candidates, including covering childcare costs and creating political scholarships that subsidise the costs of running for working-class people.

5. Government should legislate a 'right to run' that ensures employers are legally obliged to allow people to take time off to run for elected office, not dissimilar to the model around jury service.

1.
INTRODUCTION

The prime minister's fine for breaking lockdown laws his government created, alongside scandals relating to second jobs and lobbying, and disclosures about Rishi Sunak's family's tax avoidance, has once again put trust in politicians and politics at the top of the agenda. The proportion of the public who see politicians as 'merely out for themselves' has doubled to two in three since the post-war period (Quilter-Pinner et al 2021). Unfortunately, this latest debacle will have made things worse.

This decline in trust is one element of a wider pattern of democratic discontent. As IPPR set out previously in *Road to Renewal*, advanced democracies (including the UK) are experiencing a combination of 'silent' and 'noisy' democratic protests, as voters either ignore electoral politics or rail against the mainstream by voting for populist challengers (Patel and Quilter-Pinner 2022). This is particularly true for people on low incomes, without higher education and those further from Westminster.

Road to Renewal argued that one reason for this democratic protest is the growing number of citizens and communities that lack of consideration in, and influence over, the decisions that shape their lives, relative to more powerful groups. This can be seen most clearly in the resonance of Vote Leave's slogan 'take back control' which tapped into citizens' feelings of powerlessness over the decisions that shape their lives.

It can also be seen in a recent survey of 3,442 people commissioned by IPPR, Electoral Reform Society, Unlock Democracy and Compass which found that (Patel and Quilter-Pinner 2022):

- half of people say that corporate interests and donors had the biggest influence on government policy compared to 2 per cent of people who said voters did
- four in five people in Britain say politicians poorly understand their day to day lives
- four in five people say that politicians are "not interested in listening to what ordinary citizens want".

Put simply, voters increasingly feel that their voice is not heard in British politics. This includes being inadequately represented by the member of parliament (MP) sitting in Westminster on their behalf.

Part of the solution to spiralling democratic discontent necessitates a renewed effort to 'give back control' to communities and citizens. This could include significant devolution of power away from Westminster and better use of innovations in participatory democracy.

However, even if policymakers embrace these changes as we have argued they should, the UK will rightly remain a *representative* democracy. Considerable power will continue to rest in the hands of MPs and national government. It is therefore vital that we rebuild faith amongst the public in those who represent them in the House of Commons. An important part of this should be ensuring MPs are indeed representative of the people they claim to speak for.

As our political parties start to select candidates to become MPs ahead of the next election, this short briefing sets out to address four key questions.

- How representative are MPs?
- What has led to the class 'representation gap'?
- Why does class representation matter?
- How to close the class gap?

2.
HOW REPRESENTATIVE ARE MPS?

Over the long history of British parliamentary democracy, MPs have rarely been truly representative of the general public.

In recent decades, however, the House of Commons has become more representative of the British public in several regards, as more women, people from minority ethnic backgrounds and openly LGBT+ people have become MPs. This is something to be celebrated.

The proportion of MPs that are women increased from 3 per cent in 1979 to 33 per cent in 2019 (figure 2.1), in part due to concerted action by political parties. Over the same period of time, the proportion of MPs in parliament from a minority ethnic background has increased from 1 per cent to 10 per cent (Barton et al 2022), while it has been estimated there are 46 openly LGBT+ MPs in the House of Commons today (ibid).

FIGURE 2.1: THE NUMBER OF WOMEN MPS HAS INCREASED ALBEIT MUCH MORE QUICKLY IN THE LABOUR PARTY THAN IN THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY

Per cent of MPs that are women by political party, compared to the general population
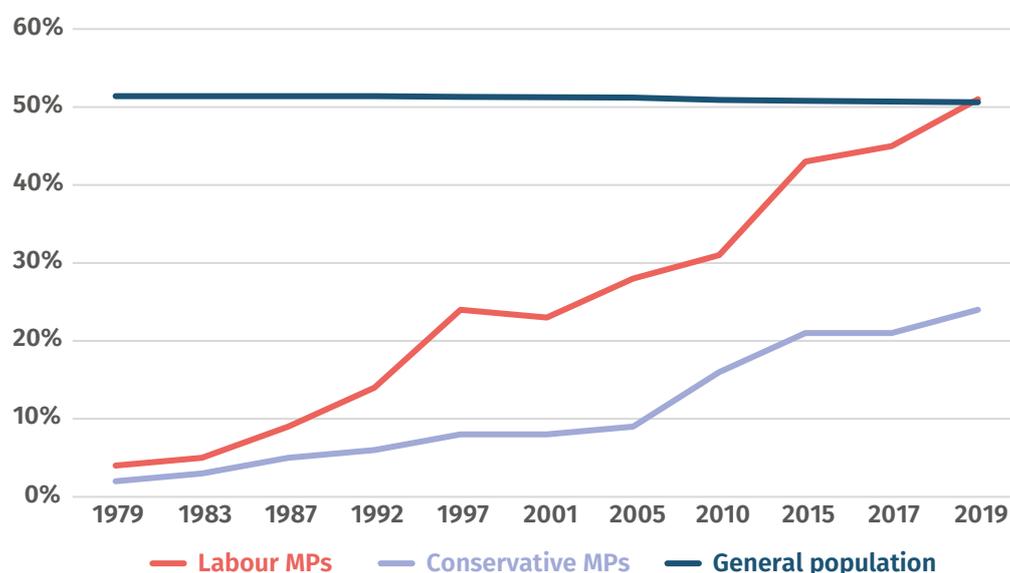
Source: Butler et al (2021), ONS (2021a)

These improvements in representation still have some way to go. There remains a 17 percentage point gap between the proportion of the public that are women and the proportion of MPs that are women. And although for the first time in history more than half of one political party's seats are occupied by women, they are in opposition – only 24 per cent of Conservative MPs are women (figure 2.1). There also remains an aggregate 5 percentage point gap between MPs and the general population in

terms of the representation of people from minority ethnic backgrounds,[1] despite improvements in the ethnic diversity of MPs over the past decade. While there are no official estimates on the disability status of MPs, our analysis of 95 MPs who responded to this question in the Representative Audit of Britain 2019 survey finds only five considered themselves to have a disability.

One key dimension of political representation, social class (see box 2.1), has been getting unequivocally worse. Specifically, the representation of working-class people has declined. Most studies documenting this use occupation-based measures of class. Oliver Heath estimates that 20 per cent of MPs in 1964 were working class compared to just 5 per cent of MPs in 2010 (Heath 2015). Over the same period of time, the proportion of the general population that is working class, measured using the same occupation-based class scheme as Heath (ibid), fell from around 50 per cent of the public in 1964 to around 25 per cent in 2010 (Evans and Tilley 2017). The proportion of working-class MPs has therefore fallen twice as fast as the proportion of working-class people in the population.

BOX 2.1: WHO IS WORKING CLASS?

Social class is a widely discussed concept in social science. An individual's social class is not straightforward to ascertain. The most common variable used in social science literature to estimate class position, as reflected by the widely used Goldthorpe and Oesch class schemes, is an individual's occupation (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992, Oesch 2006). In this paper, manufacturing or manual occupations (eg factory workers), unskilled service sector occupations (eg care workers) and trade union employees with an occupational background in their union's sector are coded as working class, in keeping with O'Grady (2019).

This reflects post-industrial transformations in the structure of the working class, who no longer work only in manufacturing and production sectors ('old working class') but also in 'unskilled' service sectors ('new working class'). Those in the 'new working class' are more likely to be younger, female and from a migrant or minority ethnic background than those in the 'old working class' (Oesch 2006).

We focus on MPs' occupations prior to entering parliament because it captures people's *contemporary* material and social status. That is to say it factors in social mobility. For example, in our view, it is difficult to argue that someone who grew up in a working-class household but went on to Oxford University and then worked as a highly-paid banker is meaningfully 'working class' any more, and it is that form of under-representation that we are interested in – of people whose contemporary positions place them toward the bottom of the social hierarchy. That is not to say those who experience upward social mobility are entirely unrepresentative of working-class communities (indeed, they are considerably better placed than those who have been middle-class throughout their lifecourse). But a focus on origins as opposed to contemporary circumstance is inadequate to study the class 'representation gap' as it stands today.

Educational attainment is also closely bound up with social class. Educational qualifications are an increasingly differentiated source of information about people's skills, capabilities and potential attainment – especially among young people whose occupational class position is less firmly established (Evans and Tilley 2017). In this paper we do not superimpose educational attainment onto social class, but we do actively

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1   This aggregate representation gap likely conceals a larger representation gap for certain minority ethnic groups. Unfortunately more granular data on the ethnic backgrounds of MPs is not available.

note the relationship between class and educational attainment and describe a 'representation gap' between MPs and the public in terms of having degree or equivalent level qualification.

Other measures of class, such as parental background, are not used in this paper primarily because there is no relevant data about MPs relating to these. However, it is worth emphasising that occupation-based measures of class are highly correlated with parental background measures of class (Hout 2008).

It is also noteworthy that around three in five people in the UK describe themselves to be working class – a proportion that has not changed since 1983, despite transformations in the structure and size of the working-class population in the UK (Evans and Mellon 2016). While that is interesting in itself, it conveys a complex story about public attitudes and perceptions of social class. For the reasons described above, this paper will focus on objective measures of social class and political representation in that regard.

The proportion of Conversative MPs with working-class occupational backgrounds has consistently sat well below 5 per cent for at least the past 50 years (Heath 2015). But in the Labour party the proportion of MPs who had a working-class occupation prior to entering parliament declined from 28 per cent in 1987–1992 to 10 per cent in 2005-2010 (figure 2.2). At the same time, there was a considerable increase in the proportion of MPs from politics-related professions, such as political advisors to MPs, as well as a rise in the proportion entering parliament from finance and business sectors. Using data from the Representative Audit of Britain survey, we estimate 13 per cent of Labour MPs and 1 per cent of Conservative MPs in the 2019 parliament had working-class occupations prior to entering parliament.[2]

FIGURE 2.2: THE PROPORTION OF WORKING-CLASS MPS IN THE LABOUR PARTY HAS DECLINED

Occupational background of MPs in the Labour party, 1987–2010
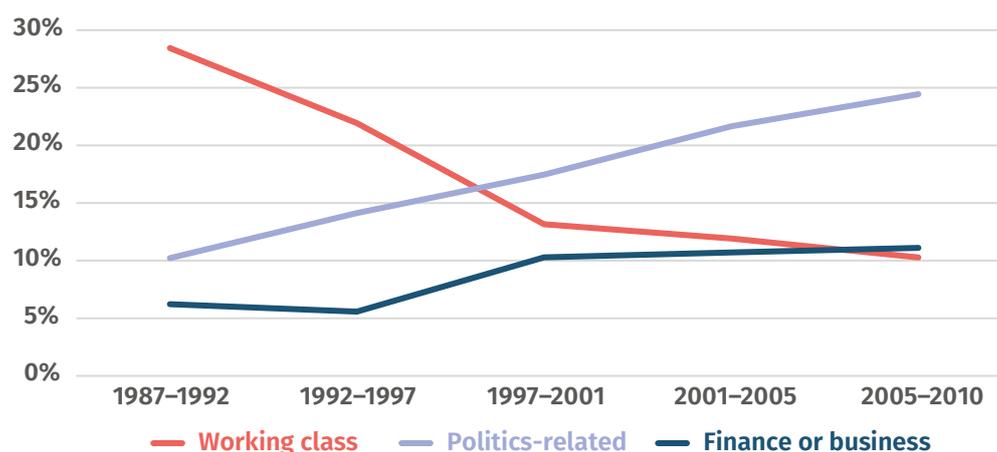
Source: O'Grady (2019)
Note: 'Working class' coded as MPs working in manufacturing or manual labour jobs (eg factory workers), unskilled service sector jobs (eg care workers) and trade union employees with an occupational background in their union's sector prior to entering politics. 'Politics-related' coded as MPs working as political advisors to MPs, political campaigners, lobbyists, those in pressure groups and think tanks, and those in political public relations companies prior to entering politics – and had no more than five years' experience in another profession in their 20s.

2   Estimates based on a sample of 539 MPs elected in the 2019 general election.

Educational attainment is also closely related to social class in the UK (Evans and Tilley 2017). Only one out of 10 current MPs in the two main political parties did not attend university. The corresponding figure in 1979 was around one in three (figure 2.3). The rise in MPs who attended university has been particularly sharp in the Labour party since 2005, outpacing the rate of growth in the Conservative party and the working age adult population. There are now a greater proportion of MPs in the Labour party that attended university than in the Conservative party. It is worth noting these shifts in MPs backgrounds have occurred at the same time as the growing power of education as a predictor of voting behaviour, including during the Brexit referendum (Calvert Jump and Michell 2020), and its emergence as a force structuring party competition in advanced democracies (Ford and Jennings 2020).

FIGURE 2.3: MOST MPS HAVE ATTENDED UNIVERSITY AND THERE HAS BEEN A PARTICULARLY SHARP RISE IN THE PROPORTION OF LABOUR MPS TO HAVE ATTENDED UNIVERSITY SINCE 2005

Per cent of MPs with a degree or equivalent qualification by political party, compared to the working age adult population
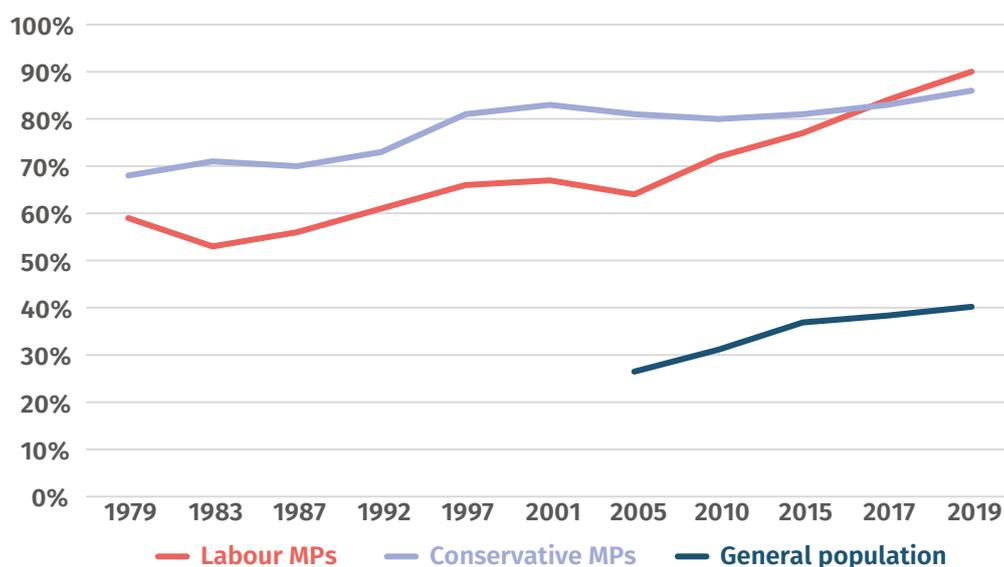
Source: Butler et al (2021), Barton et al (2022), ONS (2019)

Also related to social class is income. The salary of an MP is, of course, higher than the median full-time employee's salary. But it is noteworthy that the *growth* in MPs basic salary over the last decade has been greater than the growth in annual earnings for the median full-time employee and the median manager or director (figure 2.4).[3] The decade of slow wage growth was not a phenomenon that MPs experienced to the same extent as most citizens in the UK.

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3   It is also worth noting that many MPs earn above the basic salary level. Ministers and select committee chairs are paid an additional salary, while others receive income from second jobs outside of parliament.

FIGURE 2.4: MPS SALARIES HAVE GROWN FASTER THAN THE MEDIAN EMPLOYEE AND MANAGER

Nominal annual salary for MPs and gross annual earnings for median full-time employee and median manager or director
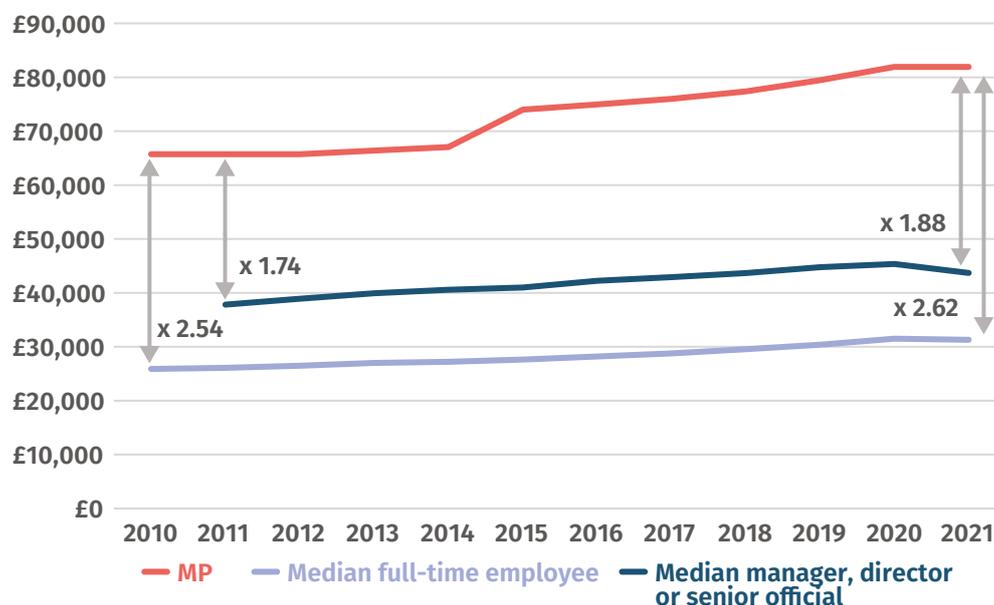
Source: IPPR analysis of Kelly (2022), ONS (2021b)

In sum, there are considerable 'representation gaps' between the public and their elected representatives in parliament (figure 2.5).

- The proportion of MPs that are women is 17 per cent below the general population.
- The proportion of MPs from a minority ethnic background is 5 per cent below the general population.
- The proportion of MPs without a degree or equivalent is 52 per cent below the working age adult population.
- The proportion of MPs with a working-class occupational background is 27 per cent below the working adult population.

FIGURE 2.5: MPS ARE NOT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UK PUBLIC

Comparison of 2019 MPs and the public in terms of proportion that are women, minority ethnic, lack a degree or equivalent and working class (%)
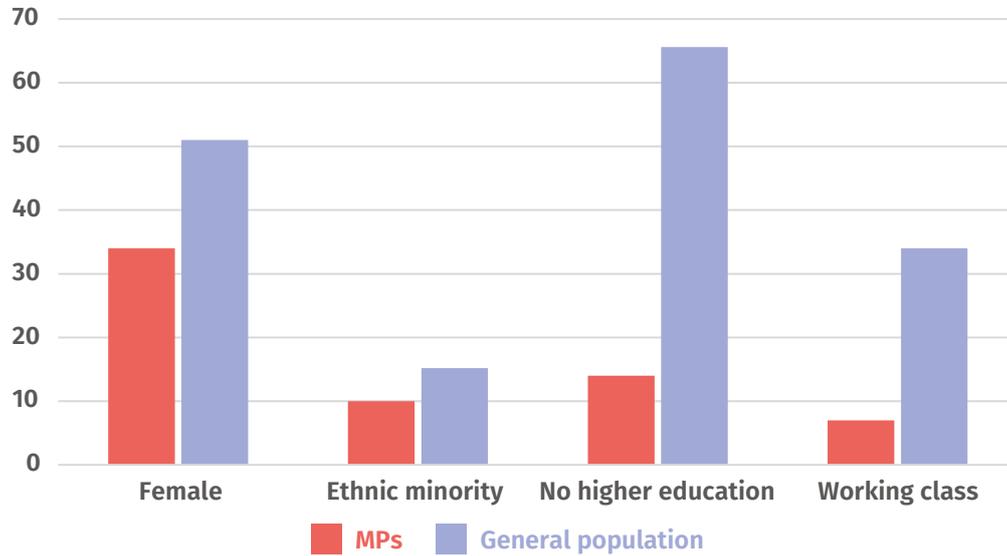
Source: IPPR analysis of Representative Audit of Britain survey (2019), Barton et al (2022), Butler et al (2021), ONS (2021a, 2020, 2019)

Note: Female and ethnic minority comparisons are to the entire UK population. Comparisons relating to educational attainment and social class are to the working age adult population. Working class is measured here by current occupation or occupation prior to entering politics. Working-class occupations coded as manufacturing or manual labour jobs (eg factory workers), unskilled service sector jobs (eg care workers) and trade union employees, in keeping with O'Grady (2019).

Parliaments in representative democracies have never been a mirror image of society. As Nicholas Carnes and Noam Lupu have documented, "politicians are almost always wealthier, more educated, and more likely to come from white-collar jobs than the citizens who elect them" (Carnes and Lupu 2016).

But while women, minority ethnic and LGBT+ communities have seen improvements in politics representation in recent decades, the opposite is true for working-class people. The *growing* representation gap in terms of social class is cause for concern. The next chapter considers why the class gap is growing and subsequent chapter documents why it is a problem.

3.
WHAT HAS LED TO THE CLASS 'REPRESENTATION GAP'?

The 'representation gap' in the UK, set out in the previous chapter, leaves us with a significant puzzle. Why, when along most dimensions Parliament has become more representative, has a gap opened up on class? What has been driving this transformation? The possible explanations for this shift can be split into two categories: a decline in demand for working-class representatives amongst voters or a decline in supply of working-class representatives by political parties.

ARE WORKING-CLASS CANDIDATES LESS ELECTABLE?
It is, in theory, possible that the decline in working-class candidates is a result of voters discriminating against them at the voting booth. This would occur if voters prefer middle- and upper-class candidates. Notably, around the world, and across time, voters have often demonstrated biases against female and racial or ethnic minority candidates. It is possible a similar effect could exist for working-class candidates.

If this 'discrimination effect' were to play out it would result in a reduction in working-class representation and could explain the representation gap. However, evidence from a range of countries suggests this is not the case. If anything, the opposite is true, with voters less keen on candidates from privileged backgrounds with high incomes, who are seen as 'out of touch'.

For example, Vivyan et al find, using conjoint experiments, that voters in Great Britain and Germany prefer politicians from a working-class and lower middle-class family background to those from an upper middle-class background (Vivyan et al 2020). Carnes has asked voters whether working-class politicians are more, less or equally qualified for office or likely to win elections. Respondents overwhelmingly answered 'the same' to both questions (Carnes 2018). Similarly, when Carnes compared the candidate pool to those who were ultimately elected in the US, he found that there was no major difference in background between the two (ibid).

Using data from the Representative Audit of Britain survey, we too find little difference between the candidate pool and elected MPs in the 2019 UK general election (figure 3.1). It suggests the unrepresentativeness of parliament is not down to a 'demand-side' voter effect that is selecting for or against particular sociodemographic characteristics. Indeed, it implies the problem is 'supply-sided' in origin – whether that be related to the selection processes of political parties or who in society considers and attempts elected office in the first place.

FIGURE 3.1: MPS AND CANDIDATES HAVE SIMILAR SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Comparison of 2019 MPs and candidates in terms of proportion that are women, minority ethnic, lack a degree or equivalent, and working class (%)
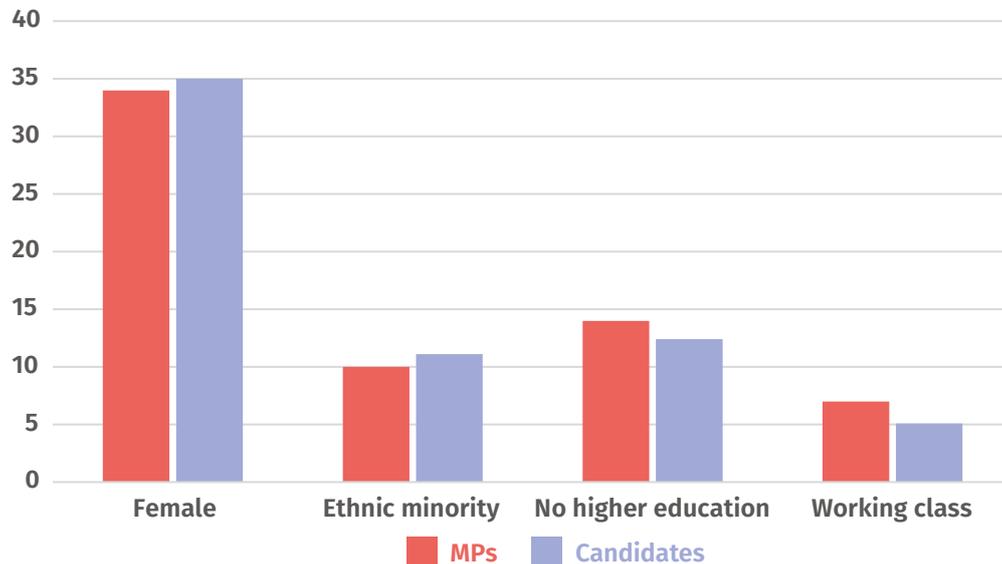
Source: IPPR analysis of Representative Audit of Britain survey (2019), Barton et al (2022), Butler et al (2021)

RECRUITING WORKING-CLASS CANDIDATES

The alternative explanation is that the supply of working-class political candidates has waned over time. First, the major route into electoral politics for working-class people historically has been through trade unions, particularly for the Labour party. Unions support their members both financially and organisationally in becoming a candidate, providing political education as well as crucial experience in political campaigning and public speaking. However, trade union memberships have shrunk and become less working class in composition, and the link between unions and political parties has weakened (Mair 2013). 'Because I was asked to' is often the strongest reason that female candidates themselves give for their decision to stand for office (Fox and Lawless 2011, 2005). Unions used to perform this function for working-class candidates, bridging the divide between communities and political parties by creating a recruitment and training pipeline. Today there are virtually no institutions that perform this function which has weakened the degree to which social democratic parties like the Labour party are rooted in working-class communities.

Second, the 'class ceiling' has been lowered as the time and money needed to run for elected office have increased. The amount of time requires to run as a candidate has increased to the point where it is essentially a full-time job, especially in marginal seats. Therefore the ability of candidates to take time off from work to campaign - combined with the risks associated with running and not being elected - has become increasingly important (Murray 2021). But most people do not have the job security or flexibility that allows them to do this. This is especially true for those in working-class occupations. By contrast there are growing number of professions who are closely linked to politics such as think tanks and lobbying firms who are often more willing to support their staff to run for parliament.

Similarly, another barrier for working-class candidates is the cost of running for elected office (Carnes 2018). While there is limited comparative data, as personal costs are rarely quantified, a UK study estimated that the personal cost of winning a parliamentary election was £61,482 in 2020 terms, with nearly half this amount resulting from lost income (Dale 2006). Clearly, this prejudices against people from working-class backgrounds, who generally have lower incomes and lower levels of savings and wealth.

This shift towards more middle-class and professionalised candidates has, at times, been accentuated by political parties themselves who have sought to promote candidates perceived to have greater 'expertise' and perceived to be more aligned to their political project. Notably, there have been numerous attempts by parties to exert more central control over candidate selection. At times, for example on gender, this has helped drive better representation, but it has also often favoured better connected and educated candidates.

4.
WHY DOES REPRESENTATION MATTER?

There is a strong moral case for ensuring that all groups of people are fairly represented among those who are selected to govern on our behalf. The exclusion of specific groups from elected politics can send a message that those groups are less important than others. Such exclusion is widely seen as contravening democratic ideals. However, this is far from the only reason to care about the 'representation gap' in UK politics.

REPRESENTATION AND POLICY CHOICES

The social and demographic composition of parliament and government has a considerable impact in determining which issues are debated and what policy decisions are made.[4] This has been most studied in relation to gender, where although the relationship is far from straightforward, greater representation in parliamentarians has contributed to advances in equalities legislation (Childs and Withey 2004, Wängnerud 2009). A similar relationship can be observed for in terms of social class.

Studies have found that working-class representatives tend to be more supportive of action to tackle inequality, increases in government spending and more redistributive welfare policy (Hemingway 2022, O'Grady 2019). Likewise, countries with working-class leaders and cabinets and parliaments with more working-class representation tend to deliver more economically egalitarian policy outcomes (Alexiadou 2022, Borwein 2021, Hayo and Neumeier 2016).

It is likely that the unrepresentativeness of MPs also maps onto issues beyond of economic and welfare policy. For example, using the Representative Audit of Britain 2019 survey, we find MPs and party candidates were around twice as likely to have voted to remain in the European Union (EU) than the electorate at large (figure 4.1).

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4   This is not to say that we should assume that someone from a particular social or demographic group will always act in the interests of that group. We are simply pointing to the link between descriptive and substantive representation.

FIGURE 4.1: MPS AND CANDIDATES WERE TWICE AS LIKELY TO VOTE TO REMAIN IN THE EUROPEAN UNION COMPARED TO THE ELECTORATE

Comparison of voting behaviour in the 2016 EU referendum between MPs, candidates and the electorate (%)
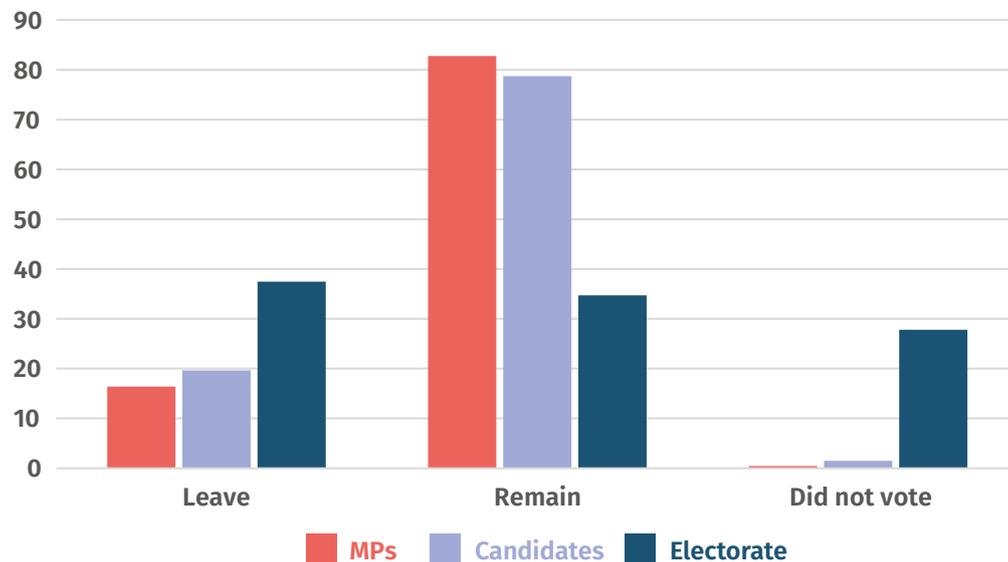
Source: IPPR analysis of Representative Audit of Britain survey (2019), Uberoi (2016)
Note: Estimates based on a sample of 238 MPs and 2,339 candidates who responded to the Representative Audit of Britain survey

REPRESENTATION AND ELECTORAL OUTCOMES

Representation also matters because it has an impact on whether and how citizens vote at elections. There is evidence that people with a given social characteristic display preference toward candidates or leaders who share that characteristic. For example, women are in general more likely than men to vote for female candidates (Brians 2005). And people from particular ethnic backgrounds are more likely to vote for people from the same ethnic background (Wolfinger 1965). A similar relationship can be seen with regard to social class.

Evans and Tilley show how during much of the 20th century Labour was regarded as the party of the working class, and regarded itself as such, but by 1997 New Labour was explicitly rejecting such linkages – and 'class voting' has dropped accordingly as the distinctiveness of the Labour and Conservative parties reduced (Evans and Tilley 2017). While Heath has shown that the declining working-class representation has contributed to the decline in working-class turnout (Heath 2015). In a study looking at the impact of the professionalisation of the Labour party and its link to working-class voters, he concludes that "working-class voters tend to be relatively more likely than the middle class to vote Labour when the Labour candidate is also working class" (ibid).

There is also evidence that a more socially diverse parliament – not just on gender and race but also on social class – would be desirable for the vast majority of voters. For example, Rosie Campbell and Philip Cowley find not attending university has a large positive influence over how candidates are viewed by voters (Campbell and Cowley 2014). The impact of whether a candidate had attended university or not had an impact 10 times greater on the way voters perceived candidates than a candidate's gender.

Similarly, Valgarðsson et al found that personal characteristics linked to 'authenticity', including how in touch representatives were with the lives of voters, were the most highly rated amongst voters – over integrity and competence (Valgarðsson et al 2021). This finding is particularly strong amongst people who voted Labour and those with low levels of trust in politics.

Such evidence suggests the characteristics of candidates that political parties select is an important factor in the ability of political parties to attract voters. Parties seeking win voters in contested constituencies, such as the so-called 'red wall' seats, should be particularly cognisant of the need to close the 'representation gap' on class and education.

BOX 4.1: DO BETTER EDUCATED PEOPLE MAKE MORE COMPETENT MPS?
One common argument against pushing for a greater number of representatives who have not attained a degree or equivalent qualification is that it will reduce the competence of lawmaking and governing. However, there is very little evidence to support this claim. Carnes and Lupu (2016) found no evidence that countries led by politicians without university degrees have worse outcomes including economic growth, inequality, inflation, unemployment and militarised conflicts. Other studies into who becomes a politician finds strong leadership and governance abilities of politicians are not related to a politician's social and economic background (Dal Bó et al 2017, Gulzar 2021). These studies confirm what is immediately obvious to anyone who has studied the history of UK politics over the last century: working-class leaders in the unions and across the main political parties have proven every bit as effective as their middle-class counterparts. There is more than a hint of snobbery in the 'poorer quality' objection to increasing the number of working-class politicians.

5.
HOW TO CLOSE
THE CLASS GAP?

Action to close the widening class 'representation gap' is urgent. Our diagnoses suggest the solutions primarily lie in the supply of more working-class candidates, rather than in shifting the demand for them amongst electorates. In this final chapter, we provide five policy steers for political parties and the government that would help to address this problem.

1. POLITICAL PARTIES SHOULD RECORD AND PUBLISH THE NUMBER OF CANDIDATES THEY HAVE FROM WORKING-CLASS BACKGROUNDS AND SET PUBLIC TARGETS TO IMPROVE REPRESENTATION

The first step in addressing the class 'representation gap' is for political parties to actively record and openly publish the number of candidates they have, at both selection and election time, from working-class backgrounds.[5] This could include documenting a candidate's occupation, educational history, estimated annual earnings and homeownership status, as well documenting their parents' occupation, educational attainment and wealth status. This should not displace a focus on gender, ethnicity, or other dimensions of representation, but complement it by ensuring all candidates are more representative on class. Political parties should consider setting public targets on the proportion of candidates selected that fit these characteristics and should build this into their selection process.

2. POLITICAL PARTIES SHOULD STRENGTHEN LINKS WITH TRADE UNIONS, CHARITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT TO BUILD BETTER TALENT PIPELINES FOR CANDIDATES

Political parties should invest in relationships with institutions that help bridge the gap between working-class people and politics. This should include better working with trade unions, who still represent millions of working-class people, to identify potential candidates who could be supported to enter electoral politics. At the same time, trade unions should give renewed emphasis to developing political candidates, and support potential candidates in making ends meet while campaigning. A good working model from the US is the New Jersey AFL-CIO's (a federation on unions) Labour Candidates Program for working-class citizens. Since the mid-1990s, its trainees have had a 74 per cent win rate, they've won in almost 1,000 elections, and they've gone on to have successful careers in politics. Given transformations described in this paper, efforts to increase unionisation rates (particularly among 'new working class' communities in the service sector) are also crucial. But action cannot be limited only to trade unions. Parties should also build relationships with other civil society institutions, such as charities like RECLAIM, who support young working-class people, as well as investing in their own candidate development talent pipelines using links into local government and community organisers.

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5   It is worth noting institutions such as the BBC and the civil service document the socio-economic backgrounds of employees. Political parties could follow this precedent.

3. POLITICAL PARTIES SHOULD INCREASE THE SIZE AND DIVERSITY OF THEIR MEMBERSHIPS

The proportion of the UK electorate that is a member of a political party has fallen from around one in 12 citizens in the 1950s to around one in 50 citizens today (Patel and Quilter-Pinner 2022). Those who are members are not representative of the general population across various sociodemographic factors, including social class (Poletti et al 2019). But being a party member is, in most cases, a prerequisite to being selected as a candidate. And therefore broadening the size and diversity of party memberships is likely to expand the pool of potential candidates. This is, of course, easier said than done. Political parties will need to be innovative in their attempts to revitalise their memberships. But the first step is simply to accept they need to reinvest in the capabilities of the party-on-the-ground rather than simply in the capability of the party-in-public-office.

4. POLITICAL PARTIES SHOULD PUT MORE RESOURCE INTO SUPPORTING AND SUBSIDISING WORKING-CLASS CANDIDATES

Political parties do run programmes to support people to become candidates (eg the Labour party's future candidates programme, Bernie Grant programme and Jo Cox programme). But there ought to be a more explicit focus on representation with regard to social class in such programmes. Parties should invest greater resources in such training programmes and should ensure they consider class representation when recruiting people to participate in the training. Moreover, parties should ensure the costs associated with running for elected office are better subsidised, eg by covering childcare costs or offering political scholarships to working-class candidates. The Women's Equality Party, for example, is the first in the UK to cover candidates' childcare costs – others could follow suit.[6] But simply providing financial assistance is not enough; the prevailing culture that politics is tough and that candidates need to be resourceful and resilient as a result is stigmatising and contributes to the 'class ceiling' (Murray 2021).

5. GOVERNMENT SHOULD LEVEL UP OPPORTUNITIES TO ENTER ELECTORAL POLITICS THROUGH A 'RIGHT TO RUN'

Political parties are unlikely to be able to solve this problem alone. The government could also help rebalance the scales between working-class and professional candidates by levelling up opportunities to enter politics. On one hand, this should include political education in all schools to promote political engagement and participation. On the other hand, we propose that the government considers legislating a 'right to run' that means employers are legally obliged to allow staff time off to run for elected office, modelled on the current system for jury service. Given the importance of time and working security in creating the 'class ceiling', a 'right to run' is likely to help level up opportunities to enter political across social classes.

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6   We recognise and welcome steps other parties have begun taking to limit the costs associated with running (eg the Labour party recently introduced the spending cap for people competing to be selected as party candidates). However we do not believe such measures are in themselves are commensurate to the size of the time-cost barrier working-class people face, and therefore encourage parties to go further by creating targeted political scholarships and covering candidates' childcare costs.

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